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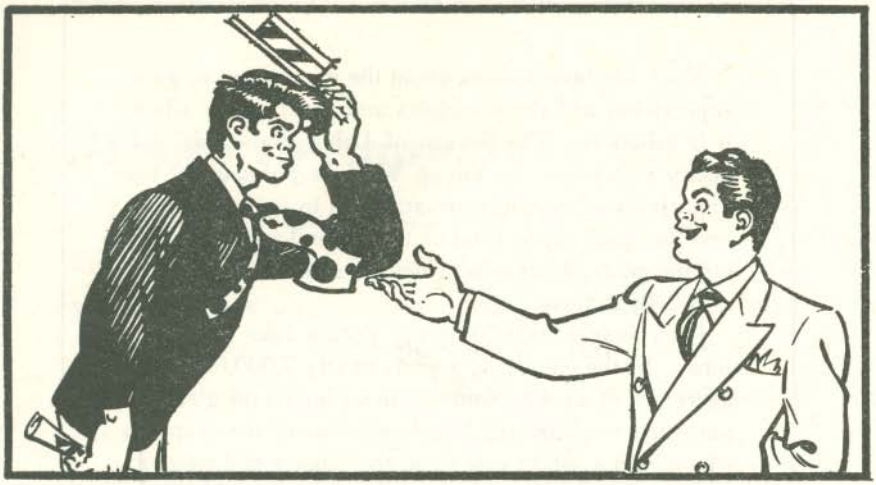

The Youth You *Supervise*

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Prepared With the Advice of the Technical Committee on Supervision of Young Workers

Much has been written about the importance of good supervision and the principles and practices by which it is achieved. The Bureau of Labor Standards' Advisory Committee on Young Workers pointed out the importance of paying more attention to young people's need for good supervision on the job and ways of applying the generally known principles of good supervision especially to them.

Each year 1,500,000 young people take their first jobs. In the course of a year, nearly 7,000,000 teen-agers are at work. Some of these boys and girls are part-time workers still in school. Some are dropouts who expect a job to give them the success and satisfactions they failed to find in school. Some take temporary jobs during vacations. Some are graduates who have serious plans for careers. About 3 out of 5 of these teen-agers are boys.

With the help of a Technical Committee on Supervision of Young Workers, whose members are listed on the inside back cover, the Bureau developed the suggestions in this booklet. It is written especially for supervisors of young workers.

Bulletin 174

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF LABOR STANDARDS
1954

Memo to Supervisors:

All business needs youth. Their sharp eyes, quick fingers, energy, and readiness to learn are assets. Yet young workers on unskilled entry jobs account for much of our turnover. If they leave before they can be moved on to more skilled jobs, it costs time, money, and wasted effort.

Capitalizing on the assets and reducing the problems in the employment of young workers is a challenge to each of us, for the work habits and attitudes that young people learn in their early jobs may last a lifetime.

Whether you have few or many young people working for you, whether they work part time or full time, it's important to you that they get started right—and important for them, for business, and for the country.

As supervisor, you can be a constructive counselor to youth, and your influence will go beyond the immediate job. Helping young people find satisfaction in work has many rewards.

Naturally you want to make efficient producers out of your young workers. Success will depend on your understanding of what youth are like and your skill in applying general principles of good supervision to youth on the job.

Let's take a look at these young workers.

What Are They Like?

Each one is different. Each is changing at his own rate and in his own way from child to adult. This time of rapid change begins at about 12 to 14 years of age and continues to 21 or 22. The period of greatest stress comes between 14 and 18.

You can almost see them grow. What does this growth mean to them? How do their attitudes and interests change? How are they struggling to work out an adult self—to decide the kinds of persons they want to be? They are anxious to "belong" in the adult world, and yet they are slow sometimes to give up their childish ways. It is important to them to be independent—to throw off adult dominations of childhood. Many of them still have to learn that grownups too are subject to authority. They're not full-fledged adults yet but they're trying their wings.

How They Grow

It takes about 8 years for a child to become an adult. During this period bones and muscles may grow rapidly or gradually. The circulatory system must expand and glands develop to perform their function for the body. Sometimes these changes are so gradual and so well coordinated that you scarcely notice them. Sometimes, though, they are so fast and so uneven that you may be dismayed.

Boys gain 50 percent in muscle volume during adolescence. Some muscles may grow faster than others. This may make young people awkward and unpredictable—even to themselves. Long bones may grow faster than muscles, and the tall boy may not be as strong as he looks.

The heart doubles in size during this period, but the tall boy's heart may not have started its spurt of growth. If a small heart has

to pump blood through a grownup body, the youth tires quickly. This is not laziness.

Glands may develop unequally, too. This often makes youth unpredictable emotionally. It doesn't mean that they are basically undependable.

Usually young people at this age are healthy—they have little illness. But growing bodies need plenty of sleep and rest.

Their reaction time and their capacity for speed and coordination in small movements are fully developed, but they need training.

How They Think and Learn

The typical adolescent of 16 or 17 has about attained his adult ability to learn. He has also reached the age when he wants to reason things out—to understand the principle back of the action. He does not argue just to show off.

You'll probably find a sharpness of mind if you look for it. Bright young people are likely to resent being talked down to. However, though they may be intelligent, they acquire judgment only through experience. Their judgment grows as they meet and solve problems.

These youth learn from observing you and their fellow workers as well as from what you deliberately try to teach them. They are especially prone to imitate grownups they admire.

Everyone learns faster when he feels at ease. Youth may be so absorbed by concern about the new situation they find themselves in, that at first their minds are not free to learn.

Success in the first steps is important to learning. If young workers are confronted with failure as they begin a new activity, they may be afraid to try again. You can help them use their mistakes to increase their learning.

Youth may be doing a great deal of intellectual and emotional exploring. This is part of what adults call "day dreaming." They look for answers to big questions—are searching for ideals, for values, for understanding of life. Their idealism makes them responsive to appeals for teamwork, loyalty, and high standards.

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How They Feel

Youth are insecure in this growing-up stage. They hate to be laughed at. They don't want to ask questions that may sound silly. Adolescents may feel grown-up and confident one day and like children the next. They grow out of this!

When they are in a self-confident phase they may act intolerant of adults who they think make mountains out of molehills. Everything is simple to them when they are in a conquering mood.

They are often very critical of themselves and sensitive to blame. On the other hand, they are reluctant to admit errors to others and are easily discouraged if ridiculed or criticized too harshly.

They may be as critical of others as they are of themselves. They expect a lot from adults around them and feel very let down when grownups fail them.

Youth have a deep need to be accepted as persons in their own right. When they are treated as adults they usually respond with adult behavior. They value the respect of adults around them, even though sometimes they don't seem to know how to gain it.

If they feel your interest in them and your desire to help them make good, they'll probably accept you as a friend and advisor.

What They Want

Youth are a bundle of contradictions. They want to be treated as individuals, yet want to be part of their "crowd." They are strongly group minded and want to be part of a team.

They want to do things in the accepted grownup way. This makes them try to appear sophisticated. To hide insecurity they may affect a bold manner, or slang, or profanity.

Young people often want different things from a job than do adults. Human relationships are important to them. They usually want most of all to like the people they work with and to be liked by them. They want the boss to like them too. They will try harder and do better if they feel they are recognized and liked.

Youth's interest in the opposite sex is not suspended during working hours. Girls and boys will play up to boys and girls

Man to man.

though it may look silly to adults. They have to learn that social interests must not interfere with the job.

Young people want to be successful. But those who are both in school and at work have school success on their minds as well as success on the job. Besides wanting reasonably good grades, they are probably concerned about success in other activities—athletics, dramatics, school social life. Their sense of values may be strained when the job conflicts with the biggest football game of the season. They may need your help in getting the right perspective.

But they want job success, too. They may expect too much too fast. They may not realize their own limitations or the limitations of the job. You may have to help them set aims in keeping with their abilities and show them how to reach them.

How Speed Their Progress?

You do for youth all the things you do for other new workers, and always you remember they are young and developing in body and mind. Because they are in that in-between stage when they are not quite adult, some general principles of supervision take on special importance in dealing with youth. Or we slant them differently when we're supervising youth.

The new worker has no shop know-how—has never experienced the routine things you're likely to take for granted in a work situation. You can expect him to react differently from adults. Remember what a change it was for you to go from classroom to workroom.

Develop Good Attitudes

You want your workers to be cooperative, to be willing to pitch in when emergencies arise, to have pride in the organization and to feel they have a stake in it. These cooperative attitudes are a by-product of all the supervisor's dealings with his employees, from

the time they apply for a job until they leave his employment. You have a great opportunity to develop good attitudes in your young workers. They're impressionable, and after all, they *chose* to work in your organization. That means they probably had some favorable attitudes toward your firm before they even started to work for you.

Go on from there. When you stress the "we" and not the "I" it makes them feel they belong. Learning about the company organization, the employee benefit program, and top management personnel and policies, will boost their morale. You can stimulate interest in the job by helping young workers see why their work is needed and how it fits into the whole pattern of the organization. It helps if you tell them ahead of time when you're planning changes that affect them.

You're O. K.!

You can develop their initiative by encouraging them to join in figuring out ways of cutting out waste or of making their work easier or better.

Praise your young workers too when their work merits it. It may be just the spur they need and will make them feel you're their friend. They'll do more out of loyalty than out of fear.

The language and behavior of the other workers will influence their behavior, too. Encourage the kind of atmosphere you'd consider suitable for your own sons and daughters.

Bad attitudes toward work or fellow workers are cited as reasons for job failure more frequently than inability to do the work.

If young workers act defiant or resentful it may be just an experiment in independence, or maybe they're identifying you with parents who refuse to let them grow up. If you use an honest approach, you'll encourage cooperative attitudes.

Attitudes are caught, not taught.

Start Them Right

You probably carry out a program of orientation for all new employees. You understand that you have to help them all adjust to their new jobs. But it takes more time and attention to specific details to get your young workers off to a good start. This is well worth doing because they have many useful years ahead of them if they get started right.

Remember that inside they're probably scared and that it is up to you to relieve the tension. A friendly word can be a lifeline. Once they have some confidence—if they're familiar with their surroundings, know their fellow-workers, and understand who's to give them orders—they'll be able to learn faster.

Take time to show them where all the facilities are—washroom, lunchroom, drinking fountains—and what to do in case first aid is needed. You'll have to explain how, when, and where they'll be paid, why deductions are made, and why some pay is held back. Company rules should be explained to them before they inadvertently offend. When they see that rules are reasonable and in the best interests of all, they're glad to observe them.

If you can put them under the wing of a friendly worker with more experience it will help them feel at home and find their way around. Other workers can help by accepting the young ones in their give and take on the job—not bullying or playing practical jokes.

Talk to them about the end product or service the establishment produces. They want to be a part of something bigger than they are.

A good start is half the battle.

Show Them How

Training workers in job skills is a big part of your job as supervisor. It's always a good idea to plan and organize jobs in short units for beginners. But for young workers this is essential.

Breaking up their jobs into short units eases them into a full workday gradually. Young people aren't used to sticking at one thing for 8 hours a day. School and home tasks have usually been short ones.

Like this.

You don't just tell young workers what to do—you show them how to do it. Take it step by step. Then let them do it a step at a time. You take it slower and go into more detail than with adult workers because you know they are green.

Talk to them in words they'll understand, remembering that shop terms and lingo will be confusing until they are explained. Make it easy for them to ask questions. When you tell the reasons for doing things your way, they catch on faster. That way they feel that you respect their intelligence and they don't have to show off to impress you.

Most beginners worry more about speed than quality. They need to know what you consider of first importance—speed or quality. They may not realize that keeping a steady pace and doing the job right makes a difference to their fellow workers. Young people don't mind your being firm about things that matter, as long as you're fair and square.

Encourage them to think about what they are doing. If they routinely perform an operation, they may routinely repeat the same error over and over until you discover it.

It's as important at this stage for youth to learn good work habits as to master skills.

Keep Them on the Job

Reducing absenteeism by keeping workers accident free and healthy concerns all of us, but most of all it concerns you as a supervisor. Absent workers don't produce goods or services.

Youth need more guidance in safety measures than older personnel. They are curious—like to experiment—take more chances. Give them clear orders about safe areas and practices. Point out that doing things the right way means doing them the safe way. Explain what the guards on machinery are for and what hazards the machines involve. Help them see the reasons for safety regulations and clean-up rules. Show them how to lift and carry. Young people like to learn new ways of using their increasing strength. The jobs with least hazards are best for youth.

Breaks in routine or changes in operation will help their growing bodies. Studies show that prolonged use of one set of muscles, constant stooping, or heavy lifting sometimes hamper healthy development. If work is strenuous or if it involves a steady strain, arrange for rest periods and changes in muscles used. Young workers may not look ahead to consider that they've got to last out the working day. Girls may not realize that they can do the job better if they wear low heels for standing. Care in observance of child-labor regulations will help protect young workers from overfatigue and injury.

If they're late often, or just stay away, you may want to try to find out why. Helping them learn to take care of their health and to feel responsible for being on the job is better than firing them. They'll probably accept guidance from you that they'd reject from their parents, once they see its relation to success on the job. If you have to fire a young worker tell him why. It may help him on his next job.

Safety and health habits learned on their first jobs will pay off for young workers and employers for years to come.

Not like this.

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Help Them Get Ahead

As a supervisor you are continually checking your employees' progress and giving them credit for good work done. You also have to look ahead and plan for future personnel needs. In order to match people and jobs you have to be able to size up people's abilities and analyze the requirements of various jobs. Don't overlook your young workers when opportunity knocks for them.

Youth may be misled by an abundance of job openings into thinking they can advance themselves by hopping from one job to another. Explain to them how they'll be given more responsibility or put on production jobs that pay more once they've got their bearings. High turnover results when young workers think entry tasks are dead-end jobs.

Encourage the ambitious ones and show them how they can get ahead. Watch for developing abilities. If promotion depends on more education or training, tell your young workers where and how they can get it.

If there are better jobs that they could be considered for in another department, don't hold them back. It's discouraging to a young worker if he's kept on a beginner's job just because he does it well, or because it's a nuisance to train him on the next one.

It's good business to see that ambitious young workers get a chance to use their highest capacities.

To obtain a copy of the full 23-page processed report, Job Supervision of Young Workers, A Report of Discussions of the Technical Committee on Supervision of Young Workers, September 30—October 1, 1952, write the Bureau of Labor Standards, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington 25, D. C.

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Your Young Workers

UNDERSTAND THEM

They are growing up physically and mentally.
They have learning ability but lack judgment.
They are striving for independence but feel insecure.
They want to conform yet value their individuality.

TEACH THEM

Make your orders clear and concise.
Start them on jobs they can do quickly and well.
Teach them safe practices.
Answer their questions and explain their mistakes.

ENCOURAGE THEM

Make them welcome.
Praise them when they deserve it.
Help them stand on their own feet.
Show them your enthusiasm.

RESPECT THEM

Listen to their ideas.
Give them responsibility when they can take it.
Help them find opportunities for training and education.
Promote them when you can.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1954

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office
Washington 25, D. C. - Price 10 cents